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C
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Burnap, Geo. W.
Review of the life,
character, & writings of Elias Hicks.

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REVIEW

OF THE

LIFE, CHARACTER, AND WRITINGS

OF

ELIAS HICKS.

BY GEORGE W. BURNAP.

[Reprinted from the Christian Examiner for November.]

CAMBRIDGE.

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REVIEW.

1. *A Series of Extemporaneous Discourses, delivered in the several Meetings of the Society of Friends, in Philadelphia, Germantown, Abington, Byberry, Newtown Falls, and Trenton*; by ELIAS HICKS, a Minister in said Society. Taken in short-hand by M. T. C. Gould. Philadelphia: Joseph and Edward Parker. 1825. pp. 322.
2. *Journal of the Life and Religious Labors of ELIAS HICKS*. Written by himself. New York: Isaac T. Hopper. 1832. pp. 451.
3. *Letters of ELIAS HICKS, including also a few short Essays written on several Occasions, mostly illustrative of his Doctrinal Views*. New York: Isaac T. Hopper. 1834. pp. 234.

THE name of Elias Hicks has attained a notoriety by himself wholly unanticipated, and probably undesired. He has been made, against his will, as it seems to us, an heresiarch, and has been placed at the head of a sect, to which his name has been attached. The consequence has been, that his character has been the subject of the most contradictory representations. His friends and admirers have thought him almost an apostle, while his enemies and opposers seem to regard him as a sort of Lucifer, a man largely endowed by nature, but using his powers chiefly for mischief; not satisfied with wandering off into error himself, but drawing after him, like the old Dragon, a third part of the stars by the sweep of his tail.

The facts are these. Elias Hicks exercised the func-

tions of a minister among the Quakers for more than fifty years, beginning about the year 1772, a few years before the Revolutionary war, and continuing till 1830, with the greatest acceptance. No suspicion of heresy, or any unsoundness of faith, seems to have attached to him for more than forty years. It was then discovered that he was a heretic, and was teaching to the community the most pernicious and soul-ruining errors. He and his opinions were denounced, and a separation took place in the Society of Friends. All who refused to join in the clamors against him were driven out as aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise. It did not stop there. His religious character was set at naught, the most revolting opinions were attributed to him, and the most shocking sentiments put into his mouth. He was classed with almost every condemned errorist that has ever appeared in the Christian Church.

and In fact, his enemies have succeeded in fixing upon him the opprobrium of deism, and with those who have had no means of informing themselves throughout the country, the opinion now prevails, that he renounced and disregarded the Scriptures altogether. This charge was so often and confidently repeated, that we confess that we ourselves supposed there must be truth in it, until, in the year 1828, we heard him preach. Nothing could well be further from infidelity than the discourse to which we listened.¹ The deepest reverence was expressed for the Sacred Scriptures. He also made a distinct and emphatic recognition of the Divine authority of Jesus Christ. His whole demeanor was more that of a humble saint, than of a scoffing infidel. If he was not a man of unaffected piety, he was one of the profoundest hypocrites that ever lived. No moral inconsistency or scandal has ever, so far as we are informed, attached to his name, and if a life of fourscore years of Christian obedience cannot establish a man's integrity, then there is no trust to be put in any evidence that man can give of devotion to God.

It is gratifying to us to find that our impression of his opinions was not a mistake, and that he has left on record

ample testimony that the charge of deism, so freely brought against him, is wholly false. In a letter written to Charles Stokes, of New Jersey, in the year 1829, the year before his death, there is the following passage:—

“As for the Scriptures of truth, as recorded in the book called the Bible, I have ever believed that all parts of them that could not be known but by revelation were written by holy men as they were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and could not be known through any other medium, and that they are profitable for our encouragement, comfort, and instruction, in the very way that the Apostle Paul testifies; and I have ever accounted them, when rightly understood, as the best books extant. I have always delighted in reading them, in my serious moments, in preference to any other book, from my youth up, and have made more use of their contents to confirm and establish my ministerial labors in the Gospel, than most other ministers that I am acquainted with.”—*Letters*, p. 215.

As to the Divine mission and supernatural character and credentials of Christ, the testimony of his correspondence with his most intimate friends is no less explicit. In the same letter he says of Christ:—

“I have always believed, since I have been a man, and reflected on the subject, in the miraculous conception of Jesus, as far as history can give belief; and no man, I conceive, is possessed of a higher belief. And as to his divinity, I am fully convinced that he was truly the Son of God, and that he could not be so, unless he fully partook of the very nature, spirit, likeness, and divinity of his Heavenly Father.”

In a letter, dated the same year, to Thomas Legget, of New York, he further says:—

“As respects the divinity of Jesus Christ, I apprehend no minister in the Society of Friends has more often in his public communications asserted the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, than I have, assuring my hearers, that he was fully swallowed up into the divine nature and complete divinity of his Heavenly Father.”

These testimonies, written so near the time of his decease, must be considered as expressing his last sentiments, and for ever put to rest the charges of deism and infidelity so often brought against him.

Why, then, were these charges made, and sought to be fixed upon him so industriously? This inquiry leads us to a history of his life, and to a development of the cir-

cumstances which, in his later years, brought him so prominently before the ecclesiastical body to which he belonged, and the religious public at large.

Who was Elias Hicks? Elias Hicks was born in the township of Hempstead, in Queens County, on Long Island, on the 19th of March, 1748. His parents, John and Martha Hicks, belonged to reputable families, and were at the time of his birth in connection with the Society of Friends. He tells us in his Journal, that he was exposed at an early age, like most young people, to the perils of light and gay companionship; and in his own words, "being of a lively, active spirit, and ambitious of excelling in my play and diversions, I sometimes exceeded the bounds of true moderation, for which I often felt close conviction and fears on my pillow in the night season." While he was yet very young, his father removed to a farm he had inherited on the south side of the island, near the sea-shore. The shore, he says, abounded with fish and fowl, "and I soon began to occupy myself with angling for the former and shooting the latter." "These amusements," continues he, "gained an ascendancy in my mind, and although they were diversions for which I felt condemnation at a later period, yet I am led to believe that they were at this time profitable to me in my exposed condition, as they had a tendency to keep me more at and about home, and often prevented me from joining loose company, which I had frequent opportunities of doing, without my father's knowledge." Another benefit, we feel confident, that he derived from these sports, was the development and formation of a sound and vigorous constitution. We saw him at the age of eighty, and a more erect and commanding form or nobler presence we have seldom seen.

About the age of seventeen, he was apprenticed to the trade of a carpenter. Here he was beset as before by temptations, and so far yielded to them that "he learned to dance, and pursue other frivolous and vain amusements." It was at a dance that he was first struck under such serious convictions, as to lead him to renounce all light and frivolous amusements for ever. At

the age of twenty-two, he took to wife, according to God's ordinance, Jemmima Seaman, daughter of Jonathan and Elizabeth Seaman, of Jericho, with whom he seems to have lived in the greatest harmony and happiness for nearly sixty years.

Soon after his marriage, his religious convictions increased upon him, and in a few years he became a recognized minister in the Society of Friends, and began to travel, as he was moved, from place to place, in the exercise of his gift as a speaker and counselor in their public meetings. He was hardly settled in life when the Revolutionary struggle commenced, and Long Island became the seat of war. Quakers, as well as others, were involved in the perils and privations which hostile armies are wont to inflict on friend and foe. It was in connection with an incident growing out of that war, that Hicks first left home in an official capacity. The occurrence, as related in his Journal, bears strong testimony to the conscientious consistency of the Quakers of that period. Under their meeting-house in New York there was a large cellar, which was usually rented as a store. When the king's troops took possession of the city, they used this store for the purpose of depositing in it their arms and ammunition. They, however, sought out those persons who had the disposal of it, and offered to pay them rent. Without much reflection, these Quakers took the money. When it came to the ears of the Society at large, it caused much dissatisfaction, and a complaint was entered, in the yearly meeting of 1779, against the proceeding. Those who had taken the money justified the act, and on being required to refund it, appealed for justification to the conduct of their brethren in Philadelphia, in similar cases. It was finally agreed to refer the subject to the meeting in Pennsylvania. Hicks was one of the delegation to lay the matter before the proper authorities. The result was, that it was determined to refund the money. Thus the original testimony of the Society against war was consistently maintained.

It was during this absence, that Elias began what might almost be called his apostolical visitations of the churches, which terminated only with his life. At this

early period, it would seem that, wherever he came, he was listened to with great attention, and began to be considered a man of mark. Before his return, he had attended meetings of Friends in no less than twelve different places on the mainland, besides three on Long Island. On this first journey he was absent nine weeks, and rode more than eight hundred miles. Thus commenced the ministerial career of Elias Hicks.

The discipline and usages of the Quakers greatly favor the manifestation, the development, and the cultivation of whatever native talent or spiritual gifts there may spring up among them. Every man is allowed to speak, but they only *continue* to speak whom experiment proves to have been endowed with that illumination which enables them to "profit withal." In this sense as they say, their ministry is ordained by God. No favoritism, no wealth, no influence of caste or clique, can uphold a man, or give him currency, without solid endowments; and every man rises to precisely that degree of influence that his character, his mind, his eloquence, his person, his manner, spontaneously command. Learning has very little to do with it, for there is little or no citation of authority. How can there be, when the appeal is to the light that is given to *every* man, and that shineth in every mind? Books may be quoted, the Scriptures may be quoted, but nothing, on Quaker principles, can be admitted as truth on authority, or which does not carry its own evidence along with it. The Quaker Society presents, therefore, the very state of things in which a profound thinker will make himself most felt. His power is precisely commensurate with the conviction he produces in the minds of his hearers. There being no special ordination over any community, the able and eloquent man has a currency where ability and eloquence are appreciated, and that is every where.

His second ministerial journey was made in the year 1781, still during the war. It was made in company with one William Valentine, and lay chiefly in the eastern parts of the State of New York. It was early in the spring, and, as the country was new and rough, it was accompanied by not a little suffering and privation. In

the course of it, he visited what is now Saratoga. Those who have seen the splendors and enjoyed the luxuries of that famous watering-place may learn what it was at that period of the Revolution from an incidental notice by Elias, in his account of his visit to this place, in 1781.

"We then rode that afternoon about twelve miles towards Albany, and lodged at an inn; and the next day we reached Saratoga, since called Easton, and lodged with our friend, Daniel Cornell. It was late in the night before we arrived, and the evening snowy; and the country being newly settled, Friends' houses were generally but poor, so that several times, while in these parts, I felt the snow fall on my face while in bed. This affected me with a heavy cold when I first came here, but I was afterwards much favored during the journey, having in a good measure become inured to the hardships we had to go through."

In this journey, which would perhaps among other sects of Christians be called a *missionary journey*, he rode eight hundred and fifty miles, attended thirty-two meetings, and visited about ninety families. In the autumn of this year he was attacked by a severe illness, in the shape of a fever, which lasted several months, and brought him near to the grave. To one who is acquainted with the laws of health, it will readily suggest itself that there was a near connection between this fever and the snow-blanket under which he slept at Saratoga.

Similar visits were made by him to different parts of New England and New York, in the years 1783, 1784, 1790, 1791, 1792, and 1793. In 1790, he made a journey to Vermont, where some impression seemed to have been already made in favor of the principles of the Quakers in the town of Strafford. The enterprise was at first successful, and a society was organized, but it afterwards fell into weakness and discord. The reasons given by Elias are significant, and are calculated to strengthen the hands of the advocates of practical preaching in preference to doctrinal:—

"For want of keeping inward enough to the principle of Divine light and grace, they became weak; and those who apprehended it their duty to teach had got too much out into words and speculative preaching and doctrines, which soon produced discord and schism among them."

Here, moreover, is a sad presage of the troubles into which he was destined to see the whole society fall, in after years, from the same cause.

This missionary journey was extended over the greater part of New England, as he records his having preached in some of the chief towns of New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. He did not altogether abstain from doctrinal preaching himself, for he tells us that at Portland, Maine, he preached to a promiscuous assembly in the court-house, and says:—"Many doctrines of the Gospel were clearly opened, and the unsound doctrines of *original sin* and *predestination*, also the schemes of the Universalists, Atheists, and Deists, were confuted from Scripture and reason."

This ministerial visitation occupied five months, and in the course of it this zealous preacher travelled, he tells us, two thousand two hundred and eighty-three miles. He visited every Quaker society in New England, besides preaching often out of the bounds of his sect.

Elias Hicks was now in the meridian of life, his powers and faculties were in their full vigor, and his reputation as an able and efficient minister was fully established. It was natural that he should wish to extend his usefulness beyond the sphere in which he had hitherto moved. The great body of the Friends lay in the Middle States. These brethren he had never seen, except on a short visit to Philadelphia during the war. In the year 1797, he carried into effect a design which he had long cherished, of paying them a visit. His record of this undertaking is interesting to those who are unacquainted with the manner in which things are done among the Quakers.

"Having for several years felt my mind drawn at times in Gospel love to visit Friends of the yearly meeting of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and some parts of Virginia, in the fall of the year 1797, apprehending the time to be nigh for the performance of the visit, I laid my concern before Friends of the monthly and quarterly meetings, of which I was a member, and received certificates of their unity and concurrence."

On his way south he stopped at New York, and attended some meetings which were held there at that time. He then visited Staten Island, and passed on to New Jersey. Every where he was well received, edifying and comforting his brethren, and experiencing great enjoyment himself in the exercise of the ministerial func-

tion. His arrival at Philadelphia, the seat of the principles he professed, and the city of Penn, was a season of peculiar enjoyment. Passing on, he remained a short time at Chester, and from Wilmington he made a tour of Delaware, preaching not only to Quakers, but to Christians of other sects, who were drawn to hear him by his reputation for piety and eloquence. Returning, he passed round the head of the Chesapeake Bay, and visiting small communities of his people, journeyed on to Baltimore.

Maryland has always contained a strong representation of the followers of George Fox. In Baltimore, they early attained to great respectability as regards numbers, intelligence, influence, and wealth. He tells us that he here bore strong testimony against conformity to the world. It was in the same meeting-house that we listened to him thirty-one years afterwards. During this visit he preached to the poor at the almshouse, and to the colored people. That his reputation has preceded him, we learn from a record he makes of one of the Friends' meetings at which he was present.

"The 11th being the first of the week, we attended Friends' meeting in the forenoon, and some notice being given among the townspeople of our being there, it was large; and after sitting a considerable time in silent labor, wherein my mind was baptized into the states of those present, I stood up with a prospect of the hurtful tendency of pride, both in religion and society."

This was his first visit to a slave State, and we find him courageously bearing the Quaker testimony against that institution in the midst of its upholders. At a place in the country called "Indian Spring," of course in the midst of plantations worked by slaves, he tells us:—

"In this meeting, I was led in a plain and full manner to expose the enormous sin of oppression, and of holding our fellow-creatures in bondage, with the pernicious fruits and effects of it to those who are guilty thereof, especially to their children; who, being supported by the labors of those held in slavery, and thereby brought up in idleness, were led into pride, and a very false and dark idea respecting God, and his superintending providence, and into many other evils fatal to their present and eternal well-being, and tending to disqualify them from being useful in almost every respect, either to themselves or society, and thereby rendering them unworthy of the respect of wise and good men."

Such was the language which it was safe for a Northern man to use at the South in the year 1797, before these days of ill-blood and mutual exasperation. In this way he traveled on through Maryland and a part of Virginia, returning through Pennsylvania to Philadelphia. Here there was a meeting of ministers and elders, which lasted for three days. Having attended this, he journeyed towards home, taking in his way several societies of Friends, among whom he labored. He was absent on this journey five months, traveled sixteen hundred miles, and attended one hundred and forty-three meetings.

Such then was the life of Elias Hicks. Such gifts, united with so much industry, could not fail to acquire extensive influence. His preaching was almost wholly practical, and we do not find that his doctrinal views met with any opposition. Whatever differences of opinion prevailed among the Society at that time, they were held in perfect tolerance and charity. There was no breach of unity throughout the whole country, and the connection enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity. At intervals of two or three years, our laborious minister made similar journeys to various parts of the country as long as he lived, and thus performed an amount of what we may call missionary duty which reminds us of the labors of Wesley, and even the Apostles themselves.

His latter days, however, were destined not to be so serene. Between the years 1810 and 1820 serious difficulties began to arise, terminating in a total disruption of that great Society for which he had labored for more than half a century. The blame of that disruption is attempted to be laid at his door. With how much reason, we shall see in the course of this article.

From the first establishment of Penn and the Quakers in America, a friendly correspondence had been kept up between them and their brethren in England, though there was no ecclesiastical connection or dependence. Each connection of affiliated societies was perfectly independent of the other. No doctrinal creed had ever been proposed or assented to. The platform of their church, if church it may be called, was not *doctrinal*, but *practical*. George Fox commenced his public ministra-

tions about the year 1648, and one of his first public declarations precludes all possibility, not only of forcing a creed upon the minds of men, but of trying any man's creed by the letter of Scripture. On a clergyman's saying that all doctrines, opinions, and religions are to be tried by the Holy Scriptures, he rose and exclaimed, "O, no! it is not the Scriptures, but the Holy Spirit, by which opinions and religions are to be tried, for it was the Spirit that led thirty people into all truth, and gave them the knowledge of it." Accordingly, no creed was ever laid down by him or the Society as necessary to membership. His only peculiar doctrine, apart from the practical principles he enforced, was this doctrine of "*the inward light*" given to every man in such measure, that, if obeyed, it must necessarily lead him to salvation.

William Penn, the ablest and best educated of all the early Quakers, became a preacher of the sect in the year 1668. He was eminently acceptable and successful. Within a few years, he published a tract with this title: "The Sandy Foundation shaken, or those generally believed and applauded Doctrines,—One God subsisting in Three distinct and separate Persons,—The Impossibility of God's pardoning Sinners without a Plenary Satisfaction,—The Justification of Impure Persons by imputative Righteousness,—confuted from the Authority of Scripture and right Reason, by William Penn, a Builder on that foundation that cannot be moved." A short time previous to the publication of this tract, William Penn had been accompanied by George Whitehead, another Quaker preacher of great eminence, in a public dispute, the subject of which was "Whether they owned one Godhead subsisting in three distinct and separate persons." Penn and Whitehead *denied* that this was a Scripture doctrine. This same Whitehead had an unquestioned standing and reputation among the Quakers, and had written nine-and-twenty pamphlets in defense of their tenets.

We hear of no outcry of heresy raised against these men. There was no "disownment" by their brethren. It is fair to conclude, then, that there was *no* doctrinal test then proposed or submitted to in the Society. Per-

sons of every variety of opinion as to the Trinity, the nature of Christ, and the Atonement, were acknowledged as Friends, were listened to as preachers, wrote books for the defense of the sect, and enjoyed all the privileges of membership. Fox himself was an Arian, and, if he had lived in the time of the Council of Nice, would have been excommunicated from the dominant church of that day as a heretic. We have every reason for believing that the same diversities of speculative belief were perpetuated, and have prevailed among the Society from that day to this. No creed has ever been invented sufficiently stringent to produce uniformity in any branch of the Christian Church. Much less can we suppose that there was any uniformity among the Quakers, who had no public creed at all.

In the course of time, however, great changes took place in the outward condition of the Quakers of England. They were at first chiefly a rural and agricultural people, simple in their habits, and principally belonging to the middle, the laboring, and mechanical classes. Those who possessed real estate were sadly harassed, in various ways, on account of their religious principles. Especially were they annoyed by being compelled to pay *tithes* to the Established Church. Vexatious and expensive lawsuits were accumulated upon them, and many of them were induced to quit the country, and come and live in cities. Here they engaged in trade, merchandise, and banking. Many of them, with their frugal, prudent, and industrious habits, became rich. With their riches they changed their associations and their modes of living, and of course their sentiments and feelings. The broad brim began to be seen in splendid carriages, in lofty mansions, and surrounded by luxuries.

It is said that in England no Dissenting family drives its carriage more than two generations. By the third generation, their acquaintances all belong to the Church, their carriage is driven to the door of the great Mother of all, and their wealth goes to patch up the broken-down fortunes of some dissipated scion of the nobility. The Quakers fared somewhat differently. They were

drawn in through their benevolence and philanthropic enterprise.

To their everlasting honor it ought to be said, that the followers of George Fox and William Penn were the earliest, most zealous, and efficient advocates of the abolition of the slave trade. They labored for many years in the cause, almost single-handed. After the attention of the British nation had been thoroughly roused, they were joined by such men as Clarkson and Wilberforce. Clarkson was thus brought to cultivate such a thorough acquaintance with the Quakers that he became their historian and eulogist. About the commencement of this century, the politicians took up the cause, a sure sign that it was becoming popular. At the eleventh hour came in the Church. The Established clergy, with the bishops at their head, suddenly discovered the enormity of a traffic which had been going on uncensured under their eyes from time immemorial.

As the clergy could not monopolize the popularity which grew out of this humane and most Christian enterprise, against the testimony of recent history, they were content to share it with its original projectors and advocates. But the joint labor gave rise to a most singular and portentous amalgamation. In the origin of Quakerism, nothing can be conceived of more antipodal than a Ohurchman and a follower of George Fox. A shepherd was not more abominable to an Egyptian, than an Episcopalian to a Quaker. If a broad-brim was ever allowed to get angry, it was when he saw the paraphernalia and the doings in "a steeple-house." But the lamb was seen at last to lie down with the lion, the Quakers and the bishops were seen side by side on the same platform, and both doubtless "deemed their dignity increased;" and without any apparent consciousness of inconsistency, the Quaker found himself in close affiliation with petitioners to Parliament to station public vessels of war on the coast of Africa, with powder and ball, with pike and sword, with halter and bayonet, to *persuade* those pirates of land and sea to give up their infernal traffic.

There was another possible cause for the reconciliation of English Quakers with the Episcopal Church. Of late

years, the English constitution may be said to stand on three legs, the aristocracy, the Church, and the public debt. Knock either of them out from under the tripod, and it must inevitably fall to the ground. Some of the Quakers, being bankers, have amassed princely fortunes, and every rich man in England becomes sooner or later interested in the funds. A part of his fortune at least is invested in the public debt, and as the tripod is a unit, he becomes just so far interested in the safety of the other legs. He is of course led to believe in the usefulness, if not in the sanctity, of the man in the black gown and lawn sleeves. We are not so uncharitable as to believe that such a motive as this could altogether reconcile a real Quaker to the Church, but we can easily conceive, such is the weakness of our nature, that it has had something to do with bringing about the amalgamation between the parties in Great Britain.

But whatever the causes, certain it is that, in the first fifteen years of this century, a strange revolution had taken place in the feelings of the Quakers towards the Established Church. A wonderful metamorphosis had taken place in the Quakers themselves. Some of them, as, for instance, Joseph John Gurney, have been educated at the universities. There a spirit has ever prevailed as opposite to the principles of George Fox as darkness is to day. So totally aberrated did Gurney become from the original testimony, that he wrote a book on "The History, Authority, and Use of the Sabbath." This book has been republished in this country at an Orthodox theological seminary, and a copy of the republication lies now before us. Any one who reads the writings of this gentleman will pronounce, we think, that he has tried the experiment, with how little of Quakerism a man may be allowed to retain the name. Coleridge, an acute observer of men and things, makes a remark to this effect: that "nothing now remains of the Quaker, the English Quaker of course, but the shell."

With this declension from the original principles of the Friends, and intimate association with Episcopacy, there sprang up among them a spirit of dogmatism, a disposition to set up and maintain a set of abstract spec-

ulations, a disposition, in short, to form and enforce a *creed*. The spirit of George Fox was essentially that of religious freedom. He formed no creed, which he might have done, when he formed his followers into a religious association. His testimonies were *practical*, and practical alone, and had reference to the practical abuses of the times. His platform was *personal piety*. Deep feeling in religion tends to *unite* people, not to *separate* them, and is therefore wholly averse to the spirit of dogmatism. Let two men of real piety come together, under the influence of some remarkable providence, which deeply stirs their religious sensibility, and they will say little about dogmas. They will rather abstain from mentioning those points of doctrine in which they disagree. They will dwell only on that common ground which underlies all personal piety. It is only when their religious feelings have cooled, that they find it in their hearts to discuss those debatable matters concerning which one good man may differ from another.

The English Church is essentially dogmatic. Its liturgy contains the two most ancient creeds, which men devised in times of ignorance and barbarism to dragoon dissent into conformity. Once a year must all its officials read out that prodigy of absurdities, the Athanasian Creed, which begins with denouncing damnation on every man who does not receive a tissue of paradoxes. The Thirty-nine Articles are conceived in the same spirit. Those who read or hear such outrages on Christian liberty are too apt to lose their sense of the stupendous wrong they do to the soul.

Hitherto entire freedom had reigned in the Quaker Church. In America, uninterrupted harmony had prevailed. Elias Hicks, as we have already seen, by a long life of devoted services, had won the confidence and esteem of all. Whatever might have been his individual sentiments, there was nothing of them in his preaching, and there is no evidence that he ever attempted to make a proselyte. And so might the Society have gone on in perfect harmony to the present hour, had they not been disturbed from abroad.

As early as the year 1811, a scheme began to be agi-

tated in England for a more close union of the Friends in that country and in America, for some purposes not specified, into one grand confederation. The proposition was distinctly opened to an American Quaker then in England. Suspecting the purpose of the movement, and knowing the independent spirit of his countrymen, he gave the project no encouragement.

In the course of a few years, measures began to be taken to carry this scheme into effect. Delegations of able and accomplished men and women began to come over, and mingle freely with their brethren and sisters on this side of the water. Wherever they went, it was found that they left behind them the spirit of disunion and discontent. Friends and neighbors, who had lived their whole lives together in peace, began to look on each other with suspicion and distrust. Parties began to be formed, and inquisition to be made into the private opinions of this man and that man on various theological subjects.

It was gradually discovered that all these emissaries, without exception, were of the high orthodox stamp. They believed in the necessity of a creed, they believed perhaps in the Thirty-nine Articles, and some of them apparently, in a good deal more. Their main object was to bring about a union of the whole Quaker body, as we have already stated. It was projected that delegates from all the yearly meetings should meet in London, and agree on a code of discipline, which should be binding on all, and incapable of being changed, except by mutual consent.

It is impossible to say what this code would have been, but, from the spirit of those engaged in the attempt that was made in Philadelphia in the year 1823, we hazard little in asserting that it would have contained a creed, and of the strongest type of orthodoxy.

The scheme, however, met with little favor any where except in Philadelphia. There it gained a considerable number of advocates. But the country members, who composed by far the larger number of that body, utterly repudiated it. In the year 1817, a numerous delegation from the members of that yearly meeting attended the

yearly meeting in Baltimore, to secure the concurrence of that body in the contemplated union. There they broached the subject. As it happened, Elias Hicks was at the meeting, and when the matter was proposed, he rose and denounced it as perilous to the Christian liberties of the American Quakers; and so great was his influence, and so powerful his reasoning, that the matter fell dead. Such was then the influence of Elias Hicks throughout the country, won by nearly fifty years of hard and faithful services, that a much less questionable scheme would have been defeated by his opposition. It *was* defeated, but from that hour Elias was a doomed man. From that day till his death, to use his own expressive language, "he was a mark to be shot at on all sides." All at once it was discovered that this eminent individual, to whom the whole body had been accustomed to look up as a saint, was a very defective character. He had been all the time a wolf in sheep's clothing. While he had seemed to be edifying the Church and converting man to God, he had been sowing the seeds of deism and infidelity. At any rate, it was said, he denied the Divinity of Christ, and the atoning sacrifice of his blood. But while they thus denied him to be a saint, they exalted him into a martyr. While they created a party against him, they endeared him to his friends, and made his preaching much more an object of curiosity than it had ever been before. Crowds flocked to hear him wherever he went. It does not appear that he had ever preached a doctrinal sermon in his life, or had taken any pains to propagate his peculiar opinions. Nor did he much alter his course now to confute the calumnies that were circulated against him. But thousands who had never examined the subject were led to inquire what the doctrines were that Elias was accused of holding, and their inquiries ended in adopting them. Those who coincided with him in opinion were called, by way of reproach, "Hicksites." Hence the denomination, "Hicksite Quakers."

From 1817 to 1825, parties assumed a more and more decided character. Large delegations from England continued to come over to pursue the work of division

and alienation. Elias Hicks continued to preach with increasing reputation and acceptance. Such a curiosity prevailed concerning him, that it became a profitable speculation to take down in short hand, and publish, a volume of his sermons. This is the first work mentioned at the commencement of this article. A volume of twelve discourses was printed in 1825, and obtained an extensive circulation. They are, we presume, only fair specimens of his ordinary manner. They are pervaded by deep seriousness, and seem to be inspired with an earnest desire to do good. The first discourse was "delivered at Philadelphia, at Friends' meeting-house, Mulberry Street, on first day afternoon, 14th eleventh month, 1824." It commences thus :—

"There is one thing necessary in this crowded assembly, and that is for us individually to endeavor to be still. The importance and seriousness of the occasion demand it.

"I am induced to observe, that, since we have been sitting together, my mind has been led to an impressive sense of the excellence and power of Divine love,—pure, undefiled love; for what is there, my friends, that it cannot effect? I was ready to say, that it could do any thing that man could want to be done. It stops the mouth of the lion, it quiets every savage disposition in man, and brings him into that state of which the prophet speaks when he says, 'The lion and the lamb shall lie down together.' We are told that it fulfills the law. I believe it may be said to fulfill all law. It is a very clear, rational proposition, that every reflecting mind must understand and see; because it can have no other motive than to do good, no other aim but to promote truth and righteousness, and therefore every obligation that attaches to us as reasonable and social beings is within the compass and power of love to effect, and to put in practice."

Towards the close of the discourse he commends the reading of the Scriptures, but subjoins the Quaker doctrine of the illumination of the spirit.

"Search the Scriptures, as we read the Bereans did, and see whether these things are so. But you cannot know them merely by reading them, but as you are directed by the light of the Divine Spirit. Under the influence of that Spirit, you may not only read and understand them, but you will be confirmed thereby. This Spirit led the ancients, and it will lead us. Our experience will correspond, when we come to understand this. Our doctrines will be alike brought forth out of the treasury."

He closed his discourse, somewhat against Quaker usage, with an audible prayer.

"Gracious and adorable God, in the riches of thy mercy look down upon thy poor creature, man. Be pleased, Lord, to bless and sanctify this opportunity to all present, if consistent with thy will. Thou knowest, gracious God, that we of ourselves can do nothing. We are clothed in weakness. Thou knowest that the work is thine, and that the power is thine. Graciously condescend to strengthen us and quicken us to come near unto thee,—to draw near unto thee, and cast down our crowns at thy footstool. Strengthen the weak and disconsolate soul; lift up the head that is ready to hang down, and confirm the feeble knee. Help us more and more to draw together, to turn unto thee with thanksgiving and glory, who remainest to be God over all blessed for ever and evermore."

Such preaching and such devotions could not be very perilous to men's souls, and it was hard for his enemies to find occasion of speech against him, or to shake his standing in society. Little was openly done against him, but secret calumnies were spread concerning him with the greatest industry. It is said by those who know, that spies were sent out to accompany him as his friends in his journeys, to catch something by which to work his ruin.

In the years from 1824 to 1827, the parties in Philadelphia became more and more distinctly marked, and proceeded from alienation to utter estrangement, and, with the views entertained by the English party, a division became inevitable. They insisted on a *doctrinal test*, and on the exclusion of those who did not come up to it. The main points were, *the Deity of Christ*, and a *vicarious atonement*, and in a city founded by William Penn, by whom both doctrines were rejected and confuted, a large majority were disowned by a small minority, as having departed from the faith, because they believed precisely as he had done.

The *spirit* in which these things were done was quite as bad as the things themselves. The following article was added to their Church discipline, soon after the separation. It reminds us first of the Inquisition, and secondly of the curses pronounced by the Jews against the great secession of the followers of Christ.

"If any of our members should attend the meetings of those who have separated from us, and who have set up meetings contrary to the order and discipline of our religious society, or should attend any of the marriages accomplished among the said people, or sign the certificates

issued on those occasions, as it is giving countenance to and acknowledging those meetings, as though they were the meetings of Friends, this meeting declares that such conduct is of evil tendency, and repugnant to the harmony and well-being of our religious society; and when such instances occur, Friends are desired to extend brotherly care and labor, that the individuals may be instructed and reclaimed, and if those endeavors prove ineffectual, monthly meetings should testify against them."

In Baltimore the division was brought about in a manner still more disreputable, and was attended by circumstances which plainly indicated the source whence this calamitous schism originated, and the agency by which it was effected.

In the month of October, 1828, the Baltimore yearly meeting convened as usual. It commenced its sessions on Monday morning, and continued its regular business until Wednesday afternoon. George Jones, a traveling minister from England, and a considerable number of the orthodox members of the Philadelphia meeting, were also in attendance. It was remarked that these individuals, with George Jones and a very few of the members of the Baltimore yearly meeting, met every evening in conclave, at the house of one of their party, and sometimes remained until a very late hour; and that they also met several mornings at the same place, whence they proceeded in a body to the meeting-house, arriving there after the meeting had been some time together.

The Philadelphia yearly meeting had been divided some months before this time. There were on the clerk's table several minutes and certificates brought by members who were present from other yearly meetings. These were read and accepted, and a committee was appointed to place endorsements upon them, recognizing their acceptance. Among these certificates there were some from both of the meetings of Friends into which the Society had now become divided, and in receiving these no discrimination was made. Upon the opening of the meeting in the afternoon, George Jones, a member of the London yearly meeting, rose, and, after referring in an excited speech to this proceeding, he said, "that it was clear to him that the meeting had departed from the original ground of the Society in receiving these certificates. It

now became proper that all who might desire to continue their connection with *the ancient yearly meeting of London* should withdraw forthwith, and seek a place where they might maintain themselves in that connection." He then added, "*I shall now leave this meeting*" Whereupon, in a hurried manner, he proceeded to the door and went out. One individual only responded to his invitation, and followed him. The meeting was thunderstruck; not a word was spoken for some minutes. When the members had recovered from their surprise, they continued their business without further interruption at that time.

It had long been a practice of the Quaker yearly meeting to severally address epistles of correspondence to each other, in which such matters as were deemed reciprocally interesting were communicated. Such epistles had at this time been forwarded to the Baltimore yearly meeting from both the divisions of the Society into which it had become separated; these were received and read.

It now appeared that the reading of an epistle in the yearly meeting of Baltimore from that portion of the Society of Friends who had been proscribed by the orthodox party in Philadelphia, had in conclave been made by their party then in attendance a test question, which was to decide the course of that party in regard to this meeting. Thus an irresponsible, self-created junta, mostly not members of the Baltimore yearly meeting, proceeded to decide for that meeting what papers should or should not be read by it. Accordingly, just as the clerk was about to read the adjourning minute of this session, in which the epistles in question had been read, one of the orthodox party rose and said, "*It has been arranged*, that, should the Philadelphia disorderly epistle be read, those dissatisfied with its reception will meet to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock, in the McKendree School-house, on the next square above." Two of the party went into the women's meeting and gave the same notice.

Among all the records of religious arrogance, intolerance, and persecution, there is scarcely a parallel to be found to this proceeding. No immorality, no declension from the ancient discipline of the sect, no unsoundness

of doctrine, was ever alleged against the Baltimore yearly meeting, or its members. Their whole offense consisted in receiving a paper from each division of a sister society, with which they had been in amicable communion for many generations !

For this offense, the unity of a yearly meeting of Friends, which had existed ever since 1672, and at the organization of which George Fox himself is said to have been present, was broken up. Nothing but the kindest feelings had ever been cherished among its members, until this firebrand of dissension was thrown in among them by foreign incendiaries.

The presumption of this proceeding will appear the more glaring, when we consider the smallness of the number engaged in it. All told, they were, when separately convened, ascertained to be but seventy-six, of whom nearly one-half were not members of the Baltimore yearly meeting, but persons in attendance from other yearly meetings. The number they left behind was more than nine hundred. The first thing they did, on coming together, was to violate the Quaker rule of proceeding, by a *viva voce* election of clerk, and they then proceeded to antedate their minutes three days ! But one representative of the whole number appointed to attend that yearly meeting was present among the seceders.

But notwithstanding the smallness of their number, they proceeded to style themselves " the Yearly Meeting of Friends for the Western Shore of Maryland, and the adjacent parts of Pennsylvania and Virginia," and they presumed to exercise the supreme judicial function of excommunication and disownment towards all who did not follow them ! This proceeding appears not only unchristian, but absurd, when we consider the fact, that, of the fifty-four representatives to that meeting, they carried but one with them, while the Baltimore yearly meeting is composed of upwards of fifty subordinate bodies, who were all duly represented in it.

In country places, their show of numbers was still smaller, and in some meetings they had not a single follower. This was generally the case in all the Middle and

Western States. But every where the same arrogance and denunciatory spirit was exhibited.

Thus was consummated the grand division of the American Quakers, one of the saddest events in the records of ecclesiastical history. Who was to blame for it, the world and posterity must judge. The agency that Elias Hicks had in it we have already seen. That he never entertained such a purpose is as clear to us as the light of day. It is wholly improbable that such a thought entered his mind for the first forty years of his ministry. There is no evidence that any change ever took place in his theological opinions. Certain it is, that there is not a word of his teaching, as far as recorded, which seems to have for its object to make proselytes to this opinion or that. And even after he was assailed, there is no appearance of his ever having attempted a formal defense or a labored justification. His preaching was still practical, solemn, and affectionate, never disputatious. The epithet "Hicksite Quaker" seems to throw on him the odium of sectarianism, and the blame of having created a schism in the sect to which he belonged, but no imputation could be more unjust. It seems likewise to reproach them who coincided with him in opinion with having been led away from their faith by some novelty of doctrine. But it is not so. The great body of the Society of Friends had entertained the same opinions since the days of William Penn. As far as the real peculiarities of the Quakers were concerned, there never was a truer follower of George Fox than Elias Hicks. In this respect, the Joneses and the Gurneys and the Braithwaites were not worthy to sit at his feet. His testimonies against war, oaths, slavery, intemperance, vanity, and a superstitious regard to outward ordinances, were frequent, decided, and ample. No man was ever more strenuous on the doctrine of the inward light imparted to all mankind. But Quakerism had nothing to do with creeds and dogmatic, scholastic theology. The real cause of the split of the denomination was the attempt to enforce a CREED. /From the time of Constantine to the present day, the effect of the attempt to force the belief of the majority upon the minority has been to scatter the flock of Christ. Much more

might it be expected when the attempt is made, as in this case, to force the opinions of the minority upon the majority.

In this case, two points of doctrine were chosen on which it is most dangerous to dogmatize,—the metaphysical nature of Christ, and the nature of the Atonement,—points upon which scarcely two Christians can be found whose opinions precisely coincide. Neither of these points has any thing to do directly with the substance of Christianity. It made no part of Christ's mission to reveal what he was metaphysically. Sacrifice, in a literal sense, is not a Christian idea. It belonged to Judaism. In Judaism there was a priesthood, there were sacrifices appointed by God. But Christianity was a spiritual and intellectual religion. "The flesh," says Christ, "profiteth nothing. The *words* that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Christ came to impart unto us his spirit. That spirit was most powerfully exhibited in his death. But none but the coarsest and most unspiritual mind can believe that the literal blood of Christ could procure the forgiveness of sins in the sense of expiating them. These are all figures of speech drawn from the old dispensation, and are used because the Gospel was first preached to the Jews, who were accustomed to sacrifices and the language which belonged to them. A superficial reader might at first suppose that a different doctrine was taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as when the writer says:—

"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through his immortal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"—ix. 12-14.

But a little consideration will be sufficient to show that this argument is *rhetorical*, and not logical. Indeed, the whole Epistle is rhetorical, and is intended to be so. It is accommodated to Jewish opinions and modes of thought. That the argument for the priesthood of Christ has no logical force may be readily seen in the fact, that it turns

on so fanciful a circumstance as Levi's paying tithes to Melchisedek, because he was in the loins of Abraham when he in this manner did homage to the king and priest of Salem! And then it may be said, that, without penitence on the part of the sinner, neither type nor antitype could have any effect to procure his forgiveness. They both, therefore, become merely the external symbols of the mercy of God. They *express* God's clemency; they do not procure it.

On this subject, Elias Hicks seems to have entertained the most enlightened ideas. In a letter to Nathan Shoemaker of Philadelphia, of the date of 1823, there occurs the following passage:—

"And inasmuch as those idle promulgators of the doctrine of original sin believe they are made sinners without their consent or knowledge, which according to the nature and reason of things every rational mind sees is impossible, so likewise they are idle and ignorant enough to believe they are made righteous without their consent or knowledge by the righteousness of one who lived on the earth near two thousand years before they had an existence, and this by the cruel act of wicked men, slaying an innocent and a righteous one; and they are bold and daring enough to lay this cruel and unholy act to the charge of Divine Justice, as having purposely ordained it to be so. But what an outrage it is against every righteous law of God and man, as the Scriptures abundantly testify: 'Keep thee far from a false matter, and the innocent and righteous slay thou not, for I will not justify the wicked;' 'Cursed be he that taketh a reward to slay an innocent person;' and much more might be produced to show the wickedness and absurdity of the doctrine, that would accuse a perfectly just, all-wise, and merciful Jehovah, of so barbarous and cruel an act as that of slaying his innocent and righteous Son to atone for the sins and iniquities of the ungodly.

"Surely is it possible that any rational being that has any right sense of justice or mercy, would be willing to accept of forgiveness of his sins on such terms? Would he not rather go forward and offer himself wholly up to suffer all the penalties due to his crimes, rather than that the innocent should suffer? Nay, was he so hardy as to acknowledge a willingness to be saved through such a medium, would it not prove that he stood in direct opposition to every principle of justice and honesty, of mercy and love, and show himself to be a poor, selfish creature, unworthy of notice?"

Such were the sentiments which have been cherished by a large majority of the Quakers in America since the time of Penn. They were growing not only among them,

but among every other denomination of Christians. Time would fail us to enumerate the various schemes which have been devised to modify and mitigate the enormity of the common doctrine of vicarious punishment among all sects. And yet this was one of the doctrines selected to form the basis of a creed, to be forced upon the consciences and convictions of Friends in America. That foreign emissaries, brought up under the slavery of an Established Church, and accustomed to see subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles exacted as a condition to civil rights, should have conceived such an idea, may seem possible, but that Americans, who are accustomed to religious, as well as civil freedom, should have been found willing to acquiesce in it, seems wholly unaccountable.

As to the other point upon which the attempt was made to enforce a creed, there has been a still greater diversity in the Christian Church. We have said, that the metaphysical nature of Christ has nothing to do, directly, with Christianity. It makes no part of Christian faith to believe this or that concerning Christ's rank in the universe. There have been good Christians who have placed him at every point from simple humanity up to supreme Divinity. Indeed, upon this point extremes meet. In fact, the highest Trinitarian is separated by only a thin partition from the simplest Humanitarian. Both admit Christ's perfect human nature, that he had a human body and a human soul. Both admit some species of identification with the Deity. Both admit that he spoke a high truth when he said, "I and my Father are one." "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." The only difference is, that they adopt different phraseology in explaining the *manner* of this identification. One says that the Second Person of the Trinity dwelt in him and made a part of his person, but still admits that the Second Person is in essence identically the same with the First Person, or the whole Deity. The other maintains, that God dwelt in him without any distinction of persons. It is confessed by those who use the word *person* to express the three distinctions in the Divine nature, that they attach no definable idea to the word. Then, if they are candid, they must confess that

the whole dispute goes out in mere words, and Trinitarianism and Humanitarianism become identical at last.

The Arian hypothesis differs much more from each of these than they do from each other. Although seeming at first sight to satisfy some passages of the New Testament much better than the others, it is found on the whole to encounter much greater difficulties, not only in words, but in things. For instance, if, in the first chapter of John's Gospel, you interpret "the Word" to mean a person, you are driven to this dilemma; to say either that the Creator of the world is not the Supreme God, and that the world was created by a subordinate being, or that the Supreme God is not our immediate Creator, and of course we have nothing to do with him.

Then the sonship of Christ, when carried back into eternity, creates inextricable difficulty, both in the Arian and high Trinitarian schemes. It does not seem consistent with the first principles of theism, that the world should have been created by a being who is *himself* created or derived. And on the other hand, *eternal* sonship seems to be a flat self-contradiction. All these difficulties are avoided if we explain Christ's sonship as he explains it himself. "The Jews answered, saying, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods? If he called them gods unto whom the Word of God came, and the Scriptures cannot be broken, say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?" His sonship is here by himself put upon the ground of his *mission*, and has no respect to his nature or origin whatever. He is the Son of God, not on account of the way in which he came into the world, or what he was before he came into the world, but simply because he was consecrated and set apart to the office of the Messiah, of which the term "Son of God" in the New Testament is generally a mere synonyme or equivalent.

This was precisely the view of Christ's nature which seems to have been satisfactory to Elias Hicks. In an

"Essay on the Birth and Office of Christ," written about the year 1821, we have the following language :—

"And secondly, after having finished the law, John's water-baptism being the last ritual he had to conform to, he immediately after this received the descendings of the Holy Spirit of God upon him, agreeably to the above prophecy of Isaiah, by which he became partaker of the Divine nature of his Heavenly Father, and by his spiritual birth became the Son of God with power, and thereby qualified for his Gospel ministry, and went forth clothed with the spirit and the power of God, preaching the Gospel to the poor."

Such were the views of Elias Hicks on the Atonement and the nature of Christ. They were identical, as far as we can judge, with those of William Penn, and we are informed on the best authority, that they have been held by a large majority of the Quakers from his time to the present. That Penn's writings had much to do in the formation of his opinions would appear from the phraseology of the following extract of a letter to William Poole of Delaware, of the date of 1822.

"Add to that, the many false reports and unjust insinuations that have been spread concerning me. I have been slandered, reviled, and defamed by pulpit, press, and talk, not only by open opposers, but also by some more privately, who profess to be my friends, terming me a deist, a seducer, Socinian, Unitarian, denying the Divinity of Christ the Saviour, and what not. And all because I have faithfully and honestly borne testimony against the false and unscriptural, though generally acknowledged and applauded doctrines of one God, subsisting in three distinct and separate persons; the impossibility of God's pardoning sinners without a plenary satisfaction, and the justification of impure persons by imputed righteousness."*

If we have accomplished in any measure the end we have proposed to ourselves in this article, the reader is now able to appreciate the character, talents, opinions, and achievements of Elias Hicks. He will comprehend the relation he sustained, first to the whole denomination of Friends, and afterwards to that portion of them to which his name has been attached. He must perceive, we think, that Elias must be acquitted of all purpose of dividing the sect to which he belonged, and that

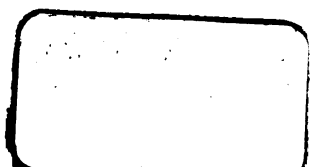
* This is almost the title of Penn's "Sandy Foundation Shaken."

no division would ever have taken place, had there been no interference from abroad. He will be convinced that the division was produced by a spirit, not only foreign to the sect in this country, but foreign to the fundamental principles of Quakerism and of George Fox. It was the spirit of ORTHODOXY, a spirit from the beginning presuming, inquisitorial, domineering, and persecuting. He will be more than ever convinced of the folly of exalting matters of opinion into matters of faith. There always has been, and probably always will be, a variety of opinion as to the metaphysical nature of Christ. Common readers of the Bible will continue, perhaps, for ages to come, to interpret literally words and phrases which were understood in a figurative sense in the time of Christ. And so it is in the matter of the Atonement. Illustration and comparison will be considered as expressing the substance of Christianity. And so it is with many other doctrines. There is no remedy for this. Little evil will spring out of this diversity of opinion, so long as opinion is suffered to remain free. But the greatest evils will always follow the course of conduct pursued by the orthodox Quakers. There will be contention, alienation, division, and every evil work.

We would observe, in closing this somewhat long article, that the speculations of George Fox lead the mind directly into some of the most interesting questions which are agitating the mind of the Christian world in our own day,—*the origin of our religious ideas*,—are they innate or acquired? do they come from inspiration or revelation? do they come from the spontaneous exercise of our faculties, or are they traditional, and derived from some primitive revelation? What is the true position of the Sacred Scriptures? are they the clearest outshining of the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, or are they immediate revelations from God, ideas communicated from the Divine Mind, and not excited by Divine direction of the laws of nature in the mind of men? These are some of the profoundest and most interesting inquiries which can engage the mind of man. They remain as yet almost wholly untouched.

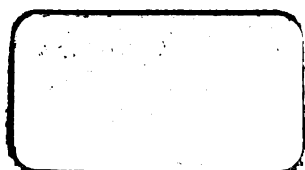
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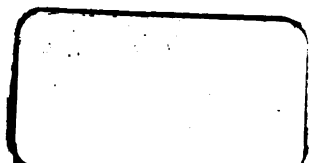
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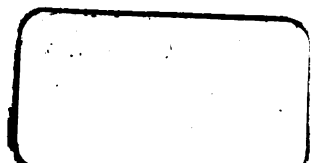
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